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DuSable to be honored with three-acre park, sculpture

By Marie Balice Ward

A sculpture by Martin Puryear honoring Chicago's first settler, Jean-Baptiste Pointe du Sable, and a new park to display it were the focal points of the Grant Park Advisory Council (GPAC) July 18 meeting. Held at Daley Bicentennial Plaza, the meeting was dominated by a presentation by Donald Young, whose Donald Young Gallery at 933 W. Washington St., represents Puryear in Chicago.

The three-acre duSable Park, being designed by the Chicago Park District after a hiatus of more than a decade due to lack of funding, would be situated where the Chicago River meets Lake Michigan.

Currently, this three-acre site is being de-contaminated of thorium, a radioactive substance. Bob O'Neill, head of the GPAC, explained that several years ago, soil containing radioactive thorium was discarded there. The USEPA (United States Environmental Protection Agency) has been removing the toxic soil, and the area has been fenced off for safety. O'Neill said that thorium has been found in other locations throughout the city,

and that its removal has never proven to be a hazard.

A number of organizations are supporting this project, O'Neill stated. He added that additional private and public funding would be needed for its \$4 million price tag. There is no projected completion date due to the environmental cleanup needed.

The duSable sculpture, 13 feet tall with a second figure at 9 feet tall, will keep facial features to a minimum because there is no known portrait of the fur trapper who was the first non-native to settle in Chicago. The portrays a man holding a hammer to convey that duSable built his home here. DuSable is considered to have been African-American, as he was partially of Haitian heritage.

The sculpture will be highly prominent in the park, which also will contain a poplar grove, a lawn, and an elliptical walkway. An existing design will be the launch point for its development.

Born in 1941, Puryear was selected to render this granite sculpture because of his ties to Chicago. As a resident in the

1980s, he taught at the University of Illinois at Chicago for many years, and his works were exhibited at the Art Institute in 1992.

In addition, he has other sculptures in Chicago including the "River Road Ring" at the CTA Chicago Blue Line station at River Road and the "Bodark Arc" at Governor's State University. Other works by Puryear are located in Washington, DC, and the Getty Center in Los Angeles. Exhibits of his art have been held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the McKee Gallery in New York City; the Joslyn Museum in Omaha, Nebraska; and locally at the Donald Young Gallery. The Art Institute published a book about Puryear in 1991.

An African-American, Puryear recently was honored by *Time* magazine as "America's Best Artist." In a July 2001 article, *Time* stated: "A master of both modernism and traditional crafts, he creates sculptures that are a synthesis of beauty but free of cliché."

The Ferguson Fund and the Art Institute are sponsoring the sculpture, estimated at \$550,000.

In a statement read by Young, Puryear explained that his granite sculpture has been designed to "age gracefully" and maintain relevance in the future, and to be both a "vigorous expression of our time and timeless."

For more information about the development of duSable Park, visit the Chicago Park District's web site at <www.chicagoparkdistrict.com>. Log on to the Donald Young Gallery web site <www.donaldyoung.com> for more information about Martin Puryear.

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